MOTHER CAREY'S CHICKENS

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MOTHER CAREY'S CHICKENS

TO

NELSON STANLEY SPENCER

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MOTHER CAREY'S CHICKENS.

WHEN seas were calm, and, far away,
Blue sky and dark blue water met,
As tranquil as the day wherein
There brooded not a cloudy threat,
They hung o'er ocean's gently heaving breast,
Flitting with languid grace from crest to crest.

When waves uprearing high and fierce
Curved stalwart necks in wild disdain,
The little waifs yet onward plied,
Tangled in nets of flying mane,
Hoping, perchance, to find at last a nest
In the vague distance of the gray-bound West.

And when the quiet night came down
  And peace had quelled the tempest's wrath,
Still by the stars I could descry
  Those patient hearts upon our path ;
They may have seen beneath the waters dark
The lamps that sent up here and there a spark.

I mused the hours away, and thoughts
  As fugitive and sombre-hued
As our dear faithful followers,
  Rose in my mind — a pensive brood.
I found of life a stern epitome
In these staunch children of the air and sea.

On restless pinions fluttering,
  Impelled by genius of the age,
Neath skies' impenetrable gray,
  O'er billows' black and wildering rage,
We are mere storm-waifs hoping to divine
A shore that ever proves horizon-line.

And ever foiled and ne'er dismayed,
We strive with eager sense to sound
The constant riddle of the years —
The Infinite that hems us round
Until it takes us to itself. One morn
The sea-birds, fading into blank, were gone.

SEA-BORN.

IN safe seclusion of her prairie home,
Queen of a bluff, out-spoken heart that holds
Her wish his law, and of a red-cheeked brood,
Her outward life is trite and full of peace.
But oft when winds run billowing through the grain,
Or wail at night like frenzied castaways,
Unreal, yet how vivid, will arouse
Mem'ries of what could not have been a dream ;
And in her ears a longing music dwells,
Like murmur of the conch, that seems to breathe
From far away where skies are gray and sad.

Awaking with a start at dead of night,
When rains flee hurrying before the blast,

And beat and break in waves upon the pane,
Again she doth live over awful hours,
Till then forgotten, of her former life.
She knows that voice that howls among the boughs,
Long ages since it haunted wonder-land.
Before her heart had dreamed of the All-Good,
Or the first vague and tremulous thought of God
Unprompted came beneath the silent stars,
She knew there was an Evil One whose voice
Shrieked hideous through far abysms of space,
Who did inhabit darkness as the birds
White-wingèd dwelt upon the noonday air.

The green wheat sinks and rises at her feet,
She gazes o'er the pulse of silent waves
And it doth seem but yesterday — anon
It seems unreckonable years agone,
When she would look o'er leagues of gentle surge
And listen to its crooning lullaby.

Those magic, yearning voices haunt her life ;
She must have lived from all eternity ;
Before the world became what now it is
Those were the sounds that ever filled her ears.
And quenchless as the rhythmic monotone
That still flows on and on within her mind,
Life will stretch out beyond the dim unknown.

She kens not when or in what clime her eyes
Opened upon the world. She never felt
A father's clasp or knew a mother's voice.
The grim and garrulous and kind old sea
Her youth did rock, as in a mother's arms,
And filled for aye the chambers of her soul
With sounds that whisper in his deepest caves.

THE NEOPHYTE.

N fervent clasp his youth's ideal
He raises o'er the tide ;
Across the deep he fain would bear it,
And reach the thither side
Still holding it aloft, in sunlight bathed,
By all the wildering turbulence unscathed.

His better self ! will he preserve it
And life's long turmoil breast ?
Ah ! he who bears a soul's ideal
Within the realms of rest
Must greatly cope, though single-armed, and saves
A treasure from the hungry maws of waves.

TRINITY CHURCH.

ABOVE the haunts where Mammon-worshippers
Madden in strife for Wall Street's yellow hoards,
Doth Trinity in tapering silence point
Aloft, to show the earth is still the Lord's.

Days come and pass, the life-tide ebbs and flows,
And beats about its base with tumult rude;
It greets alike, with calm and massive peace,
The restful night, the seething multitude.

Below are tablets, weather-worn and quaint,
Marking what once were graves, in other times;
The mounds have long been leveled, and the men
Are gone where go the softly distant chimes.

Between three worlds — the silent world beneath,
The world above the sod where discords dwell,
The world on high where franchised spirits are —
Stands Trinity, a carven sentinel.

It rises from the graves to mount beyond
This realm of earthy aims and groveling sins,
Higher it pierces — in that tranquil blue,
Somewhere above, Earth ends and Heaven begins.

GONE.

BEAR it away, earth's crumbling heritage!
Yet tenderly, for where he once made stay,
And told the hours of Time's disquiet stage,
To our bereft hearts still is sacred clay.
This we have cherished, this could him encage;
Not earth's blue dome can shut him in today.

AN ICONOCLAST.

THIS day I have cast all my statues low,
My idol men, empedestaled and grouped —
The nowaday Olympus of the mind.
They were my dreams' ideals brought to life,
And I have found them flesh and fallible.

O Thou whom craving man has toiled to house
'Neath dome and arch, in formula and creed,
And hoped to reach through wine-drenched hecatombs,
And Druid incantation, and the march
Of priestly state and choruses of praise,
Resounding like the forest racked with wind!
Thou whom through twilight that ne'er grows to day
We seek, whose glory would our vision blast

Could we behold! O Thou to whom the soul
Instinctive leaps as vainly ardorous
As flame-tongues for the sky!
Grant me a peace —
Me, the bereft, but wiser grown than erst,
Bowing to forms where guiled and yearning
youth
Beheld the likeness of the Time-old Quest —
Give patient resignation to await.

THEIR DAYS OF WAITING ARE SO LONG.

HEIR days of waiting were so long, so long ! —
Greeting with smiles that over-brimmed in tears ;
Parting for sluggard months — but hope was strong
To draw a solace from the coming years.
And o'er the barren hours, their life to be
Hover'd in blissful dreams by night and day,
As, in mid-azure o'er the sleeping sea,
The wizard dreams of glad lands far away.
But days of waiting were so long !

Their time of living was so short, so short ! —
A twelvemonth of unrippled heart-content.
The long past faded and they took no thought
Of morrow hid where blue horizon bent.

If they had askèd aught, they would have prayed
Only to drift for aye, unchanging, blest,
Nor dreamed they on that Heaven could invade
A cloud to mar the bliss of perfect rest.
Their time of living was so short!

Their days of waiting are so long, so long!—
For she was summoned, smiling through her tears,
And he is desolate — but hope is strong
To draw a solace from eternal years.
No cloud their blissful greeting may invade
Upon the quay of gold by pearl-strewn sands;
The long past shall anew dissolve and fade
In silent kiss and clasp of wistful hands.
But days of waiting are so long!

THE WILLOW TREE.

ILLOW TREE, O Willow Tree,
Why cast down so utterly?
Earth's heart freed from frosty rest
Beats beneath her grassy breast,
And the warm blood of her veins
To thy topmost limb attains;
Sky is blue with June — the sun
Thrills each other leafy one.
Sunlight chiding shunneth thee,
Willow Tree, O Willow Tree!

Willow Tree, O Willow Tree,
Thine is silent threnody.
Speechless motion of thy leaves
On the grass a darkness weaves.
Men are dreamers of a dream,
Life is myth, and fate supreme,
Earth a mound-scarred tomb to thee,
Willow Tree, O Willow Tree!

Willow Tree, O Willow Tree,
I inhale thy sympathy.
I did lay a loved form low
'Neath the frozen turf and snow.
Lids like fringèd petals drew
Close for aye o'er hearts of blue.
Smiles that lit her latest breath
Lingered on in waxen death.
I became like unto thee,
Willow Tree, O Willow Tree!

Willow Tree, O Willow Tree,
Peace to futile elegy!
Winter's day of anguish done,
Sky is blue with June — the sun
Brings new blossoms where the blast
Rent the dead leaves of the past.
June doth stir my sluggish blood,
Life again with hopes shall bud;
All my grief I bury deep
In thy drooping sunless sleep.

Alas, I shall come oft to thee,
Willow Tree, O Willow Tree!

MALVERN HILL.

(THE SECOND MORNING AFTER THE BATTLE.)

HE gray! you wear the gray? I
was struck down
When gray-coats broke retreating
from the field;
The bugles and the yells were in my ears
When sudden darkness fell too quick for
pain.
And when, through nightmare of my whole
past life,
I faltered back to self the air was still,
Day like a murky twilight filled the sky,
Dimly I saw the bodies piled and felt
Their blood in streams — I know it was the
rain
That flooded the ravine — but then it seemed
Those mangled flesh-heaps with exhaustless
veins

Were bleeding, bleeding, drowning me in
blood.
I should have drowned here but for frenzied
strength
To prop my shoulders on this neighbor
slain;
I swooned, the flood subsided ere I roused
And I have lain all night again till now.

Thank you! you have a heart beneath your
gray;
The brandy fills me with a life of flame.
I smell the orchard perfumes that would steal
Each morning through my window as I woke.
And hark! my redbreast's anthem! God is
good,
Upon a lost field dying 'mid the dead,
The bird I love, a robin, not a vulture!

No, do not raise me up, I need my strength;
The end is near, my feet are numb and cold,
Up-creeping death will soon engulf my heart,
And I would speak with you before I go.
I did intend to die with breast unlocked

And not leave e'en to God the means on earth
To set my memory aright with her
Who was my conscience, but alas the world
Takes hues through glaze of death it never wore;
The silence that was duty during life,
Were at the grave's brink treachery to self.
I place my vindication in your hands,
Then lay me in that trench the rain has washed.

She was my conscience once, my purer self,
I grew to measure all things by the test
Of what I knew her judgment would decide.
She was from Carolina and had passed
Her childhood in the South; but I had heard
My father daily at the family prayer
Call down on Slavery the curse of God.
Still I did love her tenderly and kept
A prudent tongue, till at her hearth one night

Her brother, reading from a Southern print,
Detailed with smacks of lip and fiendish glee
The story of a captured negro flogged
Nigh unto death, and branded in the cheek
Because he fled for liberty and failed.
I seemed to sniff the hemlock scents from home,
I was my father's son, I spoke for him,
And with the pent-up anger of a year
Denounced the infamy, the cherished crime
That make our land the century's stumbling-block —
Forgive me if I wound your Southron heart,
Forgive the truth from one about to die.

Her father held the young man back from blows,
In silence I was suffered to depart,
And I have never spoken with her since.
They carried her to Europe for her health,
I followed, but they left no trace behind.
I tracked misleading rumors to their source,
Watched journals in all tongues and mixed with crowds

In cities of all lands. I know not how
She was immured that not a word or sign
Could reach me in my agony of quest
For three long years — and then they reappeared,
She was a wife and mother — I have learned
That they had won her from me by a lie ;
I could not blame her that she did believe,
For she was taught from infancy to think
An Abolitionist was all things vile.
A wicked story of unfaithfulness !
They said I was unfaithful though betrothed.

And then my abnegation long began.
I saw her one night through an opera-glass,
The ghost of her old smile would rouse at times
At witty flashes in the comedy ;
But O ! the wearied sadness of that face,
The look of having yet so many years
To worry out before the end would come !
Naught could undo the past, I held my peace.
The only hope of happiness for her

Was still to think that I had been untrue,
And build within the future of her child
A new life on the ruins of her youth.
And I did love her well enough to guard
The torturing secret of my innocence,
And thought to hide it with me in the grave.
But O! I can not wander forth like one
Unshrived, still foul to her and unforgiven.
Do me the tardy justice of the truth.
He may not be a sharer in the lie,
Her husband — and when I am gone, her life
May flow on peacefully if she know all;
Aye, happier, perchance, when she can think
That this unquiet heart has reached repose.
My new, last friend, if you will seek her out,
Say that I loved her tenderly till now,
Tell her it was a loathsome, cruel lie,
Tell her —

no brandy now — bend close your ear —
She lived in Petersburg — a colonel's wife —
Her name —

THE DAY-DREAM.

HE had gone when the land was pining
'Neath Autumn's relentless blight;
When forests that whispered forebodings
Were painted with hectic light.

The desolate earth was mourning
As only a stricken one grieves;
And the joy of two hearts was buried
For a season 'neath fallen leaves.

He had folded her close to his bosom,
And pressed on her lips a farewell;
He had gone — and a loneness utter
On her path like a darkness fell.

But oft in the lapse of a day-dream,
Thought's mazy wings were unfurled,
To hover in azure and sunshine
Beyond the gray rim of the world.

And once when the spell had gathered
Her wearied senses about,
And opened the dream-world within her,
And silenced the world without,

Again did the land seem barren
And bare save for drifted leaves,
But apples hung low on the branches,
And garners were piled with sheaves.

Again o'er the hills they wandered,
And lingered in woodland nooks,
Or followed the wayward windings
Of sluggish and leaf-strewn brooks.

From yellow expanses of stubble
Came the cheery whistle of quail,
And, through air of opiate purple,
The muffled beat of the flail.

Again 'neath the trees he kissed her —
The trance is dissolved by a gleam
Of light that illumines her being —
Was that but the kiss of a dream ?

The dream is alive with a presence
That close by her side remains,
As she passes the mystic confines,
And the portals of Sense regains,

And feels tender arms about her.—
Her eyes that are freed from the spell
In life-land behold, as in dream-land,
The face that she loves so well.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

THE moon from Heaven was stretching
A wand of magic afar;
Its shadow fell in the river,
A wavering silver bar;
And from it a weird enchantment
Dropped like impalpable rain,
On a world that by eerie beauty
Was chastened from care and stain.

My darling sat by the window,
Enshrined in the tender light,
It was just a month since our bridal,
And just such another night.
We saw on the lawn beneath us,
In the arbor this side the pines,
Two forms whose outlines were muffled
By the trellised curtain of vines.

A smile leaped forth from the hidden
Blue depths of two quiet eyes,
A face with sweet mirth suffusing :
My lady was earnestly wise :
In course of our love-dream above stairs
She had watched another below,
And thought she beheld in the moonlight
A romance of the broom and hoe.

Without a word we descended
For a frolic upon the lawn,
Hoping only that stealthy footsteps
Would not of our coming forewarn.
In the spell of the vision unfolding
For a moment we stood at gaze ;
The river wound far where the distance
Was gauzed with a silver haze ;
And all the air was a glamour
Upon the mute landscape hung ;
And earth was a pictured legend.
And life a poem unsung.

We stole out within the shadow,
Then paused, as if turned to stone,

We eaves-droppers scared but shameless
At sound of a voice well known.

You have known my past and its sorrow,
Have stood by the grave of my youth.
I loved you at first for the reason
That we both loved her who is gone,
And suffered together in silence
When joy and hope vanished from earth.
Your help and your solace full-hearted
Through changing years grow more dear,
And life's little remnant I offer
With devotion and perfect trust.

O, my grave and taciturn father!
O, gentle, beloved aunt!
Ye had plotted in closest secret
The primmest romance extant.
But while we dovelets of twenty
Indoors were content to coo,
Ye must needs, ensconced in the arbor,
Make love 'mid moonlight and dew.

And love from the land immortal
  Enwrapped human hearts below,
As purely as moonlight that folded
  The earth in a dream of snow.

BUTTERCUPS.

GIVE me the secret of life universal:
How does the earth, like a poet's ripe brain,
Bring forth the fruitage of fact and of fancy—
Oak-trees and buttercups over the plain?

Whence the mysterious instinct that broodeth,
Silent, immortal, through torpor and cold,
Till the sun tempts one more summer, green-bladed,
Forth from the tomb of the years in the mold?

Thus could I stand with my questions till doomsday,
You, my sweet flowers, are heedless and mute:
Yes — though perchance the great All-soul of nature
Bides just beneath in the soil at your root.

But I'm beginning to moralize gravely,
Touching on themes that sage heads have perplext ;
Here will I pause — you are my inspiration,
You the whole sermon as well as the text.

Yours unalloyed is the gladness of being :
Tremble with rapture and spill on the ground
Sunshine by thimblefuls — each little chalice
Lavish the infinite joy it has found.

Then, as the winds in the distance awaken,
Scattering fragrance abroad as they pass —
Shallops on breast of the meadow at anchor —
Ride the green, languorous billows of grass.

Little it matters what fate is ordaining ;
Children may wantonly pluck you in play ;
Your fleeting span has been amply sufficient ;
You have been beautiful for a whole day.

AUGUST.

I.

T was one of those August days
When, spiritualized by haze,
The air is purple revery.
The hills were a blur of deeper blue
Like the horizon-line at sea.
The breeze that would fitfully arouse
Had been a-haying in the mows.
Bent and shrunken the sallow maize
Like sapless graybeards gone a-craze.
Over the brook the leaves of a beech
Like parchèd tongues lolled down,
To water gurgling just out of reach
O'er pebbles musical and brown :
The lazy brook was wider awake
Than men and women or birds and boughs ;
It glided between the patient cows
That stood in tranquil, meek-eyed drowse,

And sprent the air with motes of spray
Lashing the droning flies away.

II.

Then there glittered a fire-fly spark,
The trees were losing themselves in the dark
That gathered the fading West in a cowl.
From far came the curdling hoot of an owl.
A shrill dispute of katy-dids ;
The stars were waking with blinking lids ;
A bat skated past in erratic flight ;
The haze was a fog of murky light.
In the East, that would be murkier soon,
The crescent tip of a blood-red moon.

WINTER'S ADVENT.

ITH winds like heralding furies,
From his realm of night in the north,
From strongholds encastled with icebergs,
The Winter came suddenly forth.

And when the winds for a respite
Shrank back and were still in their lair,
The sky was o'er-cast and leaden,
And brooded in sullen despair.

But gently and slowly from cloud-land
Came fragments of diamond glint,
Star-flakes, heaven-coined, still retaining
The beauty and stamp of the mint.

Then myriads scurrying downward
Enfolded the barren dearth ;
And the dark under-lining of Heaven
Became the white carpet of earth.

CHIVALRIE.

HAT, little Mabel! reading old romance?
Come here, and leave that dusty chimney-nook,
And do put by that antiquated book —
I'll show you all you've read at one swift glance.
The sunlight gilds earth's carpet of soft snow,
Behold without The Field of Cloth of Gold!
The trees are knights so valiant, tall, and bold,
Steel-clad in icicle-mail from top to toe;
And see the evergreens upon the lawn —
Fair ladies who will never lose their charms;
Soon will the wind sound loud the battle-horn —
There'll be a tournament with clash of arms,

J. EDITH.

HOU wast not born before thy time,
For thee the world is at its prime:
This Eastlake era; day of pugs;
Of plush screens libelous of bugs;
Of tigers prone on glossy rugs,
And tapers trim in brazen sconce;
This comely Queen Anne Renaissance!
The age awaited thee serene,
Self-poised and wise and just sixteen.

It seems nor jest nor masquerade
When thou dost don the stiff brocade,
The gold-clocked hose and yellow lace,
With more than worthy grandma's grace.
Think what poor things some mortals are
Who never had a grandmama!
And she who spends her days at chores,
Who never 'broiders, prinks or draws,

And seeks at night hard, welcome cot —
The tragedy of such a lot !
Yet, thy patrician ways are sweet,
And we do deem it not unmeet,
In earnest half, and half in sport,
To own thy sway and pay thee court.
Thou ne'er didst soberly despise
The humblest heart 'neath homely guise,
Who, raised by worth, her fate above,
Could unembittered toil and love.
For us of every day, thine own,
Thy love informs each look and tone ;
And love makes glad the loyaltie
That faithful vassals bring to thee
Of dainty port and tender mien,
Gracious and fond at just sixteen.

As keen as poet's rapture thine !
Life is a cup of bliss divine ;
Thou canst do all save mount and fly
For deeper draughts of sun and sky.
Doffing the old, thou canst forget
Staid, stately steps of minuet,

And trip a gay, impromptu maze
To thine own blithely warbled lays.
A special dialect thou hast;
And honest, English words recast
By those arch, saucy lips express
All shades of dire coquettishness,
Accompliced by demure, gray eyes
Where Merriment in ambush lies,
Anon to issue and retreat
With Fancy's transformations fleet —
Thy moods the iridescent sheen
Of teeming joy at just sixteen!

I would not bid the Future ope,
Or seek to cast the horoscope.
Old Time (who's called a surly one,
But has a grim, sly sense of fun,)
May some day try to palm on me
A portly matron form as thee.
But, climbing to the garret's height,
In dim, not irreligious light,
Mid aged, eyeless tiger rugs,
And screens by moth bereft of bugs,

And ghosts of dead and buried pugs,
I shall behold the real thee ;
Again with pensive gladness see
This age incarnate in its queen,
Self-poised and wise at just sixteen.

FAME.

E saw it on the moor-lands,
Feebly and dimly bright,
Dancing, luring, fleeing,
A ghost of ruddy light.

He followed, all forsaking —
Where dank marsh flowers wave
O'er death that lurks beneath them
He found at last a grave.

PYGMALION TO APHRODITE.

GODDESS fair of soft desires,
Thou whose spirit is love-laden,
Kindle passion's waking fires,
Breathe thyself into this maiden.

Love's sweet influence round her moving,
Love her soul and essence giving,
May her life be simply loving,
May her love be simply living !

ROLLIN.

ILKEN fur so sleek and glossy,
Satin paws and velvet ears,
Breast as white and soft as sea-foam,
Eyes—two yellow, jewelled spheres!

Facile grace that takes caresses
As his birthright and his due;
Pure aristocrat that never
Aught but wealth and purple knew!

Sensuous ease in air and posture,
Eyes half closing faintly peep,
Purr as gentle as the breathing
Of a maiden lost in sleep!

Rollin lies before me dozing,
On his head a sunbeam plays,
Has not seen or heard the stanzas
I have written in his praise.

TO MY PIPE.

LIGHT thee and conjure sweet visions in smoke,
Siren-shapes forming and wreathing in play,
Fairy-sea rising and falling in waves,
With fragrance of spice as from isles far away.

Thou hast been the true friend of my studious hours,
Knowledge came with thy smoke and its eddying grace,
And wisdom, though lingering, came too at last,
And increased as the color grew dark on thy face.

And whenever the world seemeth heartless and rude,
Thy blue, floating fancies my solace shall be:
I'll take thee, old friend, and evoke as of yore
A poem between the world's coldness and me.

TO AN AMATEUR CORNETIST.

I.

ANKIND would rend thee joint by joint,
Or to a ling'ring death would cane thee,
Would vote thee worse than Hunter's Point,
And pray the Board of Health to bane thee.

When first thy prelude cleaves the night,
Strong men on bent knees quaking tumble,
Hearing the Last Trump, in affright
Await the End's initial rumble.

Then maddened at the false alarm,
Helpless, but muttering profanely,
They listen while through even's calm
Float trills and flourishes ungainly.

Oh ! faint not ! Pour thy two tunes forth
In rapt succession, slumber scorning,
Till heavy eyes, and lips that froth,
With anger greet the gray of morning.

II.

But I have seen your kindred grand
On pedestals of homage posing
(What time I strayed on Coney's strand),
With eager crowds around them closing.

And many now who toss and groan,
Before the brazen calf were bending ;
O ! choose your most blood-curdling tone,
The harsh tornado's roar transcending !

And would your fellows might be sown
Broadcast through this Philistine city,
With lungs of iron, hearts of stone,
To blast till daybreak, dead to pity !

That men may run, as from the Fiend,
At sound of brass, imploring mercy :
And human nature may be weaned
From thralldom to a worse than Circe —

A fog-horn soloist who blares
With turgid, cork-screw variations
Your self-same two, long-suff'ring airs,
And struts and smirks through loud ovations.

Then blow! Through trembling midnight blow!
In Art's true service you've a station.
O, friend, build better than you know;
Bring on your craft annihilation.

TWO TURKEY-COCKS.

N sooth, thou'rt not a pretty bird,
Thy plumage lacketh tints and lustre,
Why wilt thou stand with tail outspread?
While wondering kindred round thee cluster?

Yon peacock struts by Nature's right,
He to a gorgeous tail is pendant;
But thou, O envious, would-be fop,
Art not thus caudally resplendent!

Although thou'rt sleek, thy beauty ne'er
Could gain the candid predilection;
Thy virtues only will appear
With sauce and knife and fork dissection.

O ponder on thy certain doom,
And strive presumptuous pride to govern!
In tragedy thy life must close,
Think of the gravy and the oven.

Ah, foolish, discontented one,
That seekest with thy fate to quarrel!
But, turkey, I've a human friend,
And thou for him wilt point a moral.

He is a giant round the waist,
His legs are pillars short and bandy;
A Falstaff's form and ursine grace,
At heart a Romeo and dandy.

He is a ponderous gallant,
And cultivates the tender passion;
He says his greatest joy in life
Is but to hold a lady's sash on.

His mind is filled with genteel lore,
To feed society's scandal-hunger;
He has no peer in social art,
He's an inspired gossip-monger.

And yet the world laughs in its sleeve,
Laughs at his ardor, his dimensions,
His mincing, elephantine pace,
His rakish manner and pretensions.

Ah, sad for him, he must compete
With rivals younger far and thinner !
His truest forte would be to grace
A cannibal's Thanksgiving dinner.

VIATICUM.

ALMA MATER.

LOVED Alma Mater, thine arms still around us
Are clasped in their last and their fondest embrace ;
We sever this day the ties that have bound us
While blessings beam forth from thy time-honored face.
We know not the future, 'tis veiled in the shadow
By this pensive hour of sad parting cast ;
But one wish we have, that the years yet before us
May be but as happy and bright as the past.

Like caravan halting equipped for the journey,
We turn a last look on the joys we must leave,
And hope that the blessing vouchsafed us at morning

May cheer the long day till the shadows of
eve ;
And oft as we toil o'er the glare of the sand-
waste
We'll think of thy love so enduring and
fond,
That follows us over life's hot, arid desert,
Until we shall reach the green pastures
beyond.

Hand clasped in hand and hearts beating one
measure,
Benisons grateful and loving we breathe ;
Ever around this pure shrine of affection
Chaplets of hallowed remembrance will
wreathe.
Here would we pledge in the strength of our
manhood
Ever to cherish the loves of the past ;
Faithful through all to our dear Alma Mater,
True to ourselves and to her to the last.

College of the City of New York, 1875.

VIATICUM.

A Poem for the Tenth Anniversary of the Class of 1875 of the College of the City of New York.

TIME was in the days that we fondly recall,
When the section-book held us in scholarly thrall,
When "10s" were the prizes of life in our eyes,
When we bolted stale learning and Chellborg's fresh pies,
When we revelled in lore at the city's expense,
And rang the drear changes on case, mood and tense,

Ah, then Inspiration was lodged in our throats,
Gushing forth in our song like the dust from old coats.
But now, times have altered — no longer our lives
Are set unto music, but trammelled with gyves.
The hopes and the fancies that gladdened life's morn
Have flown like the birds when the summer is gone,
And we sternly confront the long seasons to come
With hearts that are earnest but lips that are dumb.

But hold! what an elegy! — some one I hear —
Are we wrinkled and bent, are you sixty and sere?
How precociously senile you poets would grow
With your spinning of rhymes and your borrowing woe!

Are we so many midges to die ere the day
Waxes half-way to noon? — we implore you
delay
Till your time comes your toothless, lugubrious
strains,
Or give us a poet with blood in his veins.

And the point is well taken, our blood
courses thick,
Our pulses with energy curbless are quick;
We have stomachs whose craving no carking
care dulls;
We have flesh on our bones and good brain
in our skulls;
Of talents, the pleasing round number of
ten;
Aspirations surpassing our own boldest ken.
Our names shall be by-words on far distant
shores,
The blue vault grow turgid with nations'
applause,
And the age that contains our collective
careers

Phosphoresce like a match-box through all
coming years.
Which, being translated, means briefly that
we
Are launched on a squally, tempestuous sea,
Where we paddle round barks, get upset,
scramble back,
But never lose sight of our course on the
tack
To success, which we'll gain, after long years
of strife
Unremitting and moist, in the tub-race of life.
And ere life with waiting grows tedious and
cloys,
We hope to be blest with man's coveted toys.
Wealth — fountain of power — we hunger to
hold
O'er obsequious vassals the sceptre of gold.
Position — a part in political broils,
To stir up the cauldron, and then when it
boils
A pretty loud voice in dividing the stew,
Not forgetting our own purely personal due.

Distinction in letters — the craving to fill
White pages with spiderish ramblings of quill —
Our stock in oblivion that like ourselves
Will moulder to dust rang'd in order on shelves.
And when all is over, pall-bearers of note,
Expressions of sorrow got neatly by rote,
Resolutions of condolence trink'd out with rhymes,
And a column at least in the *Tribune* and *Times.*

Yet, with all this before you, I say you are old,
And I charge you in frankness be never cajoled
By your strength or ambition or glibness of tongue
Into thinking your world is yet dewy and young.
Can you dimly discern through the deepening haze,
That purples the distance and thwarts the fond gaze,

That land than all others more verdant and
fair,
Where we breathed in the blue of the sky in
the air,
Where the moon winnowed silver on streams
as they fled,
Where sunlight unstinted o'er nature was shed,
And the white clouds adrift in the azure ex-
panse
Were freighted with day-dreams from ports of
Romance?
We wandered abroad, sunny-hearted estrays
From the Golden Age fallen on prim, modern
days,
On pipelets of willow rude-shapen and shrill
Woke music that erst churlish mortals would
thrill,
When Pan, the Great, hobbled at large on the
plain,
And tossed off a tune to his rollicking train.
There pleasure was more than a fast-fleeting
wraith,
We were wise in the untutored wisdom of faith;

We cared not for fate's decree, fortune's rebuff,
For Life throbbed within us and Life was
enough.

In the world of our present, Life dwindles,—
its zest
Is lost in the breathless and maddening quest
For baubles that melt in the warmth of the
touch,
Eluding yet tempting the feverish clutch.
And barren the days that bestow as they pass
But blue of the sky and the green of the grass,
And bring us not fame, useful knowledge and
gold,
In greed and ambition I say we are old.

Shall we give up the strife then and seek to
return
To our dream-world, and, safely there, quickly
unlearn
The hard, bitter lessons these later years
taught,
And banish for aye the sad burden of thought?

Ah no! we are men, and the land that we love
Is as far from our reach as the soft sky above.
With a very ill grace we should idle away
The days of our present world, playing at play.
The joys would be tasteless — the spirit has flown
With the years that have past and the beards that have grown.
(Moreover the law all our fine ardor damps
With a stringent decree on the subject of tramps.)

But to-night, as your poet, I fain would recall
The life-poem revelled in once by us all;
And I charge you keep sacred and fresh to the last
The stay for life's journey bequeathed from the past —
Recollections of rapture and virginal truth,
That were ours in Fancy-Land, Fairy-Land, Youth.

JUAN PONCE DE LEON
AND
BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS.

JUAN PONCE DE LEON AND BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS.

(HISPANIOLA, 1512.)

PONCE DE LEON.

OST thou believe the tidings late arrived,
Of Bimini and of its sparkling fount
Whereof one drinks and straightway sheds his aches,
And all the malady of being old,
As in the holy tale I've heard at mass,
They shed their ailments in the troubled pool?

LAS CASAS.

I do believe it true, for God is great
In our day as he was in Jesus Christ's,
And oft doth send a wondrous miracle
To waken an enthusiast faith in men,

Who else had only followed close the Church
In all her rites, insuring Heaven at last,
But meanwhile sucking every flower of earth
For carnal sweets.

PONCE DE LEON.

This day my search begins.
The risk is small — a few blank, tremulous years
In which no peace, but coveting the past.

LAS CASAS.

What would you with the fountain? It was given
To quicken sluggish faith — a visible sign
For sensual, purblind souls who needed one,
And, having heard this marvel from His hand,
Say *Ah, yes, God is great, I had forgot.*

PONCE DE LEON.

What would I with the fount?—my faith is sound,
In much more excellent health than this poor frame,

I go to Mass ; my fat Confessor says
I make the cleanest breast of any one.
I have been over-virtuous and told
My sins as they had been had I been young.
I had committed them at least in heart,
And it was pleasant to recount them thus.
But this frail body !—why I cannot drink
A flask of wine without a purge next morn,
And lying by a long, dull week for rest.
Inez will take my coin and flatter me,
But well I know my boy receives unbought
Her constant tenderness, perchance doth think
(He's not so bad — I would if I were he —)
His sire would be better off gone hence,
And wish that one could be both young and rich.
Could I but win her heart from him I'd —

LAS CASAS.

Hold !
You seek to make God's handiwork a pander.
The sin of three-score years is not enough,

You needs must have a whole eternity
Of grovelling with the swine. I'll pray this night
That you may find the ocean's slimy bed,
Or bleach with orbless sockets on the sun
Upturned, 'ere you may see the fount of youth.

PONCE DE LEON.

Forgive me, father; pray not thus I beg;
Forgive an old man's rambling tongue that aye
Was lewder than himself. Behold this arm
That now I scarce can strain above my head;
Once I could grasp a lithe Toledo blade,
And, whirling it in sport with dazzling speed,
Clothe me in haloed lightning. I would play,
Disguised like all the rest, the matador,
For love of risk that still was never danger.
The brute would corner me and gore the air,
And feel my rapier searching 'twixt his ribs.
Then I could swim a league in mad delight,
The water boxed me in its vixen mirth,

And hugged me with a woman's wantoning.
Ah, life was worth the living till I turned
Some two-score years, then it began to seem
As if my day were over, but I still
Must stay to tell old tales and bear dull
jibes.
If death were but a sleep and I could have
In everlasting dream my vanished youth,
I'd quit realities and seek the dream.

LAS CASAS.

Thy fleshly soul is groping towards the light.
Thou mayst have youth through all eternity,
Not as a vague, unsatisfying dream,
But as a live reality with God.

PONCE DE LEON.

Yea, I would have the live reality.
I dream my youth o'er often now at night,
But ever there is something that withholds
Just at the last the sweets I fain would grasp.
I beg thy prayers that I may find the fount
That giveth youth, not torturing dreams of it.

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LAS CASAS.

I'll pray for thee that God may cause the earth
To swallow up the fount He summoned forth,
And there may raise in sacred effigy
His own Son bleeding on the holy cross.

PONCE DE LEON.

O pray not so! wouldst arrogate to be
Wiser than God on what is best for man;
He did create it and shalt thou gainsay?

LAS CASAS.

How earthy blind thou art, as blind as he
Who holdeth close his eye a paltry coin
And doth shut out the very sun of Heaven!
Tear from thy spirit's eye the fleshly lust
That hides eternity. Come thou with me!
This hour shalt thou find immortal youth;
Thou shalt be holy — holiness is youth,
The being like to God who changeth not —

And thou shalt join, e'en here on earth, the throng
Of angels young from all eternity,
And saints gone hence whose youth hath been restored.
Plainer than spoken words, within thy heart
Their prompting shall inspire to noble deeds,
And by a thousand unmistaking signs
Their guarding presence shall be manifest.
Come thou with me! thy few short years below
Thou shalt pass toiling for these heathen souls
Who ne'er have heard of Him who died for them.
Thou shalt have youth immortal and sweet rest
And never wish the fever back.
Thou wilt?

PONCE DE LEON.

I am a man of arms, a worldling born;
In battle I have slain a hundred Moors;

I should go mad within your brotherhood.
O father, pray that I may be restored
To beauty, strength and hope and I will make
Most ample recompense to thee and God.
I will be valiant for all time on earth
Against the heretics ; not one of them
My vigilance and vengeance shall escape ;
With fire and sword I'll purge them from God's sight,
And hold the world forever true to Him.

LAS CASAS.

I'll pray for thee, thou poor, misguided one !
Knowest what thou dost ask so fervently ?
To be shut out for aye from Paradise,
And wallow here below in blood and lust ?
Never to sit white robèd at God's feet ?
Ne'er to behold sweet Mary Mother's face ?
Never to walk with Christ in holy bliss ?
Ne'er to reach sainthood and be pure in heart ?

Thou canst not bribe me with the heretics,
Ponce de Leon, I will pray for thee!

PONCE DE LEON.

Pray not! I read thy meaning in thine eyes.
Thou'lt pray that I may search within a span,
Yet never find the fountain of glad youth.
Father, forget that I have askèd aught,
Forget me and pray not!

LAS CASAS.

I'll pray for thee.

SONNETS.

NATURE.

THE Parcæ stern who cowed the world in awe,
When Thought was young and Art was in its bloom,
Though Paganism fills a classic tomb,
Rule modern Christians as the men of yore.
Hoping to master Fate in prudent law,
We toil and plot and close our eyes to doom,
Or seek to guard against impending gloom,
Devoutly nailing horse-shoes to the door.

And all is vain. Some sit in stoic calm,
Callous to ills that cruel fortune wreaks;
Some, with Promethean heart and Titan arm,
Curse and defy the bristling vulture-beaks;
And some would find an anæsthetic balm,
Thy will be done their upward gaze bespeaks.

HELEN OF TROY.

S it a joy to live for aye in song?
Dost thou with thirst that glory ne'er can sate,
Upon the dark flood's thither margin wait,
To hear one poet more thy reign prolong?
Or dost contemn the worshippers who throng,
And curse thy Nemesis far-eyed — the fate
That doomed through thee to lay earth desolate,
And would not let thy name die with the wrong?

Remorse ne'er bowed that head of wondrous gold
Erect, defiant of immortal shame.
But art so weary, of thy tale oft told;
Of man's idolatry and woman's blame;
Thou would'st been born a beldame crook'd and cold
To have been spared eterne ennui of fame?

LOVED EVEN YET.

FORGIVE thou wilt, dear Love, but O forget
The mood estranged, the cruel shock and pain,
The bitter, jealous words of lips insane,
Whose wounds, beyond the heal of keen regret,
Those brown eyes with a dewy trembling wet.
Thou wilt forgive, nay, more, wilt search in vain
On thy pure loyalty for speck of stain,
And, crushed by love's requite, love even yet.

Darling, a love as thine so true and good,
For its own chosen one a shrine must build;
Know not too well this heart, its idolhood
Unworthy, with unfaith ignoble filled;
Nor wake — I still that presence bright would seem,
Wrapped in the aureole of tender dream.

AFTER SICKNESS.

I DRIFTED out upon the unknown deep,
That hems our being round on every side,
And thou with tearful hope a breeze did bide
From Heaven to bear me homeward to thy keep.
My thoughts were as the dreams of troubled sleep,
My visions blurred as stars upon the tide;
But o'er the narrow stretch that seemed so wide
I saw a lonely watcher wait and weep.

What if the breeze had drawn from off this shore,
I would have wandered back from yonder coast;

Would'st thou have ta'en me to thy heart once more,
Or, horror! would'st thou not have known and fled,
As blooming Life aye shrinkest from the dead,
Not cried *'tis thou*, but said *alas! poor ghost?*

A YEAR.

AND has a year gone; this again the snow?
'Tis vain to summon recollections dim;
Visions as vague as August landscapes swim,
Of Spring that came and set the world aglow,
Of Summer's cloudless blue and green below,
And Autumn's purple robe, — again the rim
Of Winter's ermine fringes every limb —
'Tis but a dream that time doth onward flow.

Ah love! doth stealthy Time purloin our years,
By making them like blissful phantoms fly,
To pay them back in usury of tears,
And leaden sorrow of reality,
When one of us in waking anguish hears
The other's dream-farewell?
God grant not I!

EMERSON.

O thee the prayer of all was granted — Light!
Thou hast felt life-warmth through the age's rime,
Hast pierced the mask of flesh, the veil of time,
That heart from heart and soul from soul benight.
And whoso kens thy word to man aright
Finds in the world a spiritual clime,
Beholds the Present as a land sublime,
Peopled with beings of heroic height.

To eras gone their prophet-seers have brought
God's new-born truth to feed a hungering race;
And thou, like those of old, hast read His thought

Writ in the stars by night ;—His secret
place,
The solemn forest, thou by day hast sought,
And heard His voice through boughs that
hid His face.

LONGFELLOW.

GENTLE minstrel! songs of thine can start
In eyes of stony calm the boon of tears;
The thoughts that swell the current of the years
Vex not the placid sweetness of thine art;
But whoso goeth from the fray apart
To weep away his wounds, while in his ears
Still rankle cruel taunts and sullen sneers,
Will bless thee — healer of the bruisèd heart!

The clamorous day heeds not thy plaintive notes,
But when the night with wand of darkness stills

The strife of bustling hands and blatant
throats,
And twilight's last gray lingers on the
hills,
Then through my reverie thy music floats,
As through the dusk the song of whip-poor-
wills.

BRYANT.

HE forest anthem from green choirs of trees
Was ever in his ears ;— the woodland brooks,
Prattling like children through dim, mossy nooks,
Were eloquent of sacred mysteries.
A bard who sang afar from haunts of man !
(Man's heart is cankerous with greed and lust.)
And he forgot life's sordid age and rust,
Where earth is young as when Time first began.

The poet with a sympathizing care,
Enshrined the bloom of nature in his art,
And sent it forth to glad the breathless mart :
Here mid the noonday turmoil of the streets,
His opened volume sheds upon the air
The piny fragrance of those cool retreats.

L'ENVOI.

(TO THE MUSE.)

HIS is the record of our secret joy,
The stolen hours when we love-vigils kept
While 'neath the stars the earth in silence slept.
Thou art a mistress warm of heart but coy,
And for the few hours spent in sweet employ
When over waters hush'd the moonlight crept,
I have through lonely nights thine absence wept
Whose constant love and beauty ne'er could cloy.

I cannot flee the haunts of toil and wealth,
Choose poverty and follow thee alone,
I still must chaffer in the market-place.
And wilt thou yet with love's delicious stealth
Grant sweet tryst of the cynic world unknown,
And soothe me with thy tender, dreamful face?

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